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AUTHOR Wyrick, Phelan A.
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ABSTRACT

The demand for effective approaches to prevent juvenile delinquency is growing. This bulletin provides information on the Westminster's (CA) Strategic Home Intervention and Early Leadership Development (SHIELD) Program, a promising and effective approach to delinquency prevention. By improving coordination among law enforcement; school systems; social services; and community service providers, the SHIELD program facilitates early identification and treatment of at-risk youth who might otherwise be overlooked. It identifies youth at risk for involvement in violent behavior, substance abuse, and gang activity, and refers them to appropriate community services. This utilization of existing services is both a cost-effective and immediate choice for intervention. Programs that provide a clear mechanism for linking at-risk youth to services in the community show great promise for preventing delinquency. The critical supporting factor for the SHIELD program is not funding but the support of law enforcement dedicated to preventing delinquency. (Contains 15 references.) (JDM)

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John J. Wilson, Acting Administrator
November 2000
JUVENILE JUSTICE BULLETIN

Law Enforcement Referral of At-Risk Youth: The SHIELD Program

Phelan A. Wyrick

The demand for effective approaches to prevent juvenile delinquency and subsequent adult criminal behavior is growing across the Nation. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) actively supports the development, evaluation, replication, and dissemination of information about promising and effective approaches to delinquency prevention. The City of Westminster Police Department in Orange County, CA, has developed an innovative strategy for enhancing the prevention of delinquency by improving the use of existing community resources. This Bulletin provides an overview of Westminster's Strategic Home Intervention and Early Leadership Development (SHIELD) program. SHIELD uses contacts that law enforcement officers make in the normal course of their duties to identify at-risk youth and connect them with community resources. By improving coordination among law enforcement, social services, community service providers, and the school system, the SHIELD program facilitates early identification and treatment of at-risk youth who might otherwise be overlooked.

The SHIELD program was initiated in 1996 and funded through the California Governor's Office of Criminal Justice Planning with Byrne Block Grant funds from the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance. The logic and design of the SHIELD program grew out of the recognition that law enforcement officers frequently encounter youth who are exposed to conditions that predispose them to later delinquency and adult criminal behavior. Furthermore, the status and position of police and sheriff's departments allow them to serve as unifying elements in communitywide efforts to prevent delinquency.

Identifying Youth At Risk of Delinquency

Seasoned law enforcement officers in departments around the country have come to recognize early warning signs for later delinquency. Responding to calls, officers enter homes where youth have been exposed to domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, gang activity, neglect, and other criminal behavior. Officers see youth who have been exposed to crime and violence on the streets, in their schools, and among their peers. Many experienced officers know delinquent youth whose first encounters with law enforcement were as victims of crime or as family members of someone who was arrested. Officers frequently recognize that such victimization experiences and exposure to criminal and delinquent family members are related to later offending.

From the Administrator

Police officers play a crucial role in the juvenile justice system, one that extends beyond enforcing the law. The police officer on the beat has first-hand knowledge of the community and its youth—knowledge that can prove a valuable asset in efforts to prevent delinquency.

Initiated in 1996, with funding from the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Westminster, CA, police department's Strategic Home Intervention and Early Leadership Development (SHIELD) program takes advantage of contacts made by law enforcement officers to identify youth at risk of delinquency and refer them to appropriate community services.

Not only are officers familiar with the youth in their communities, they are increasingly knowledgeable about risk and protective factors related to delinquency. This Bulletin describes how the SHIELD program mobilizes these assets to identify youth at risk of involvement in violent behavior, substance abuse, and gang activity and to address their needs through a multidisciplinary team approach involving representatives from the community, schools, and service agencies.

I trust that this Bulletin—targeted to law enforcement, policymakers, community organizations, and others concerned about juvenile justice issues—will assist other communities in their programming to shield youth from delinquency.

John J. Wilson
Acting Administrator

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Current research on the risk factors that distinguish youth who are more likely to become involved in delinquency from those who are less likely to do so confirms and expands on what some law enforcement officers already know. Risk factors can be defined as conditions in the environment or in the individual that predict an increased likelihood of developing delinquent behavior (Brewer et al., 1995). Risk factors for delinquency and violence are generally described in five categories: community, individual, peer group, school related, and family (Brewer et al., 1995; Hawkins et al., 1998). Community risk factors include poverty, physical deterioration, availability of drugs, and high crime rates. Individual risk factors include childhood hyperactivity, aggressiveness, and risk taking. Peer group risk factors include association with a peer group that has favorable attitudes toward delinquency and gang membership. School-related risk factors include early and persistent antisocial behavior and academic failure. Finally, family risk factors include family conflict, family management problems (e.g., failure of caretakers to set clear expectations, lack of supervision, and excessively severe punishment), and favorable attitudes toward and involvement in crime and violence (for further discussion of risk factors for delinquency see Gottfredson and Polakowski, 1995; Howell, 1997; Hawkins et al., 2000).

OJJDP's longitudinal, prospective research on the causes and correlates of delinquency has found that delinquency and violent behavior stem from the accumulation and interaction of risk factors in the five categories described above (Thornberry, Huizinga, and Loeber, 1995; Hawkins et al., 1998). The probability of violence and delinquency increases (sometimes dramatically) with increases in the number of risk factors (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1998). For example, a study of 411 South London boys found that the percentage of boys convicted for violence more than doubled in the presence of 1 risk factor but increased tenfold in the presence of 4 or 5 risk factors (Farrington, 1997).

Researchers have also identified a number of protective factors that provide a buffer against risk factors (Hawkins, Catalano, and Miller, 1992; Thornberry, Huizinga, and Loeber, 1995). These include individual factors (e.g., high intelligence and positive social orientation),

factors related to social bonding (e.g., supportive relationships with family members or other adults), and healthy beliefs and clear standards of behavior (e.g., norms that oppose crime and violence). Because protective factors also tend to have cumulative effects, youth who have or are exposed to a large number of protective factors show greater resilience in coping with the risk factors in their lives than do those with fewer protective factors.

Although the understanding of risk and protective factors is increasing, questions remain about how police and sheriff's departments can best use this information. Law enforcement administrators who want to prevent delinquency may be discouraged by the perceived practical difficulties of coordinating a prevention program, especially because most departments are already very busy just responding to calls for service. Administrators at the Westminster, CA, Police Department considered these issues when they created the SHIELD program. Instead of designing a program in which services are delivered directly by the police department, they developed a coordinated mechanism that uses a multidisciplinary team to identify at-risk youth and connect them to existing services in the community.

The SHIELD Program

The SHIELD program is designed to accomplish two primary goals. First, it uses the contacts that police officers make in the course of their normal duties to identify youth who they think are likely to become involved in violent behavior, substance abuse, and gang activities. At-risk youth are identified as those who are exposed to family risk factors such as domestic violence and other criminal activities in the home. Second, SHIELD provides youth with services that are tailored to meet their individual needs by using a multidisciplinary team of representatives from the community, schools, and service agencies. The primary mechanism that supports these goals is the youth referral process.

To illustrate how the SHIELD program represents a change in traditional law enforcement activities, consider the following scenario:

> A 911 emergency operator answers a call from a woman in panic. The caller states that her husband has just beaten her and is still in the house. A patrol car is dispatched to the scene. Officers find a bruised and shaken woman waiting in her front yard with her 12-year-old son and 5-year-old daughter. The youth witnessed the abuse but were not physically harmed. The officers learn that the husband is currently intoxicated and has a history of abusing his wife.

A typical law enforcement response to such a situation is to apprehend the husband, assess the woman's need for medical attention, and determine the extent to which the welfare of the children was compromised. In cases where officers find evidence of child endangerment, Child Protective Services (CPS) may be asked to intervene. CPS may determine that home conditions pose a significant threat to the children and take steps to remove them from the home. However, this action is generally reserved for only the most serious cases. Because of legitimate concerns about the potential negative effects of removing children from the home, many children are left in homes where violence and criminal behavior are common. Police frequently have few alternatives when family risk factors exist but CPS determines that the children's welfare is not compromised to the extent necessary to remove them from home.

The SHIELD youth referral process gives officers a procedure for providing assistance to youth who are exposed to family risk factors. In the scenario described above, the responding officers would be required to do little more than their normal reporting to initiate the SHIELD

referral process. The names and ages of the two children would be included in the police report as standard procedure because both were witnesses to the offense. The officers would be required only to determine which schools the youth attend and mark a box on the police report form that indicates a potential SHIELD referral.

The SHIELD Referral Process

At the outset of the SHIELD program, all officers in Westminster were given the following orders as part of the youth referral protocol:[1]

> Police personnel are required to obtain the name, age, and school attended of any minor youth living in a home where a report is filed involving the following police activity: family violence of any type, neglect or abandonment, gang activity, drug sales or usage, arrests made associated with alcohol abuse, or any other call for service where the welfare of minor youth is at risk due to the behavior of older siblings or adults living in, or frequenting, the home.

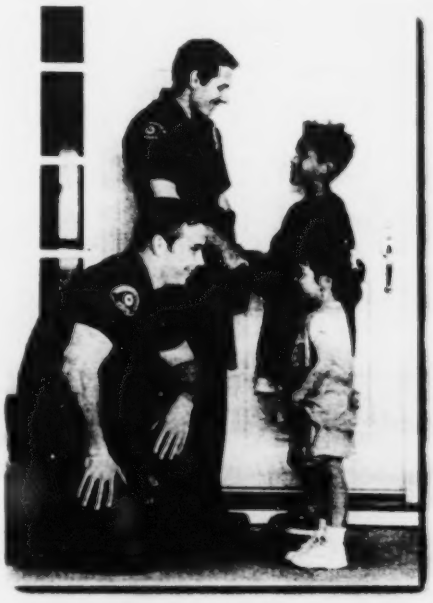
The SHIELD program model (see figure on page 4) outlines the process of events that are involved in facilitating intervention through the SHIELD program. Whenever an officer responds to an incident or makes an arrest, he or she completes a standard report to document the details of the contact. If the officer identifies a youth as having been exposed to risk factors, he or she marks a box on the police report and forwards a full copy of the report through departmental channels to the SHIELD resource officer (SRO).[2] On receiving a report, the SRO assumes responsibility for administering the SHIELD program and screens the case to determine whether the circumstances make the youth appropriate for SHIELD intervention. In the early stages of the program, the SRO simply used the family risk factors that were noted in the youth referral protocol to verify that the reporting officer had correctly identified a youth from the target population. More recently, the Westminster Youth Delinquency and Gang Involvement Risk Assessment instruments were developed by drawing heavily on Lipsey and Derzon's (1998) synthesis of longitudinal research examining predictors of delinquency. These instruments are used to strengthen the screening process and prioritize access to services based on the level of risk each youth faces.

The risk assessment instruments enable the SRO to place youth in low-, medium-, or high-risk categories for both general delinquency and gang involvement. Separate instruments were created for youth at ages 6–11 and 12–14 to increase sensitivity to the differing effects of risk factors on youth at different developmental levels.[3] In addition to these instruments, an inventory of protective factors is used to supplement the assessment. These risk assessment instruments and procedures are in the testing phase, but they are already proving useful in setting priorities for referral and treatment.

If the SRO deems a case appropriate for SHIELD intervention, he or she creates a student referral report, which contains a short synopsis of the incident as it pertains to the youth, demographic information about the youth and his or her family, contact information for the parents, and information from the assessments of both risk and protective factors. The SRO then sends the student referral report to the Youth and Family Resource Team. This multidisciplinary team includes officials from the local school district, such as the pupil personnel administrator, the district nurse, a specialist in drug abuse prevention, and school principals; counseling staff from a community service provider; a county social worker; the Westminster Community Services Recreation Supervisor; the SRO; and a second officer formerly assigned to Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.). Beyond the core group of members who attend regular weekly meetings, the team may invite additional members, such as teachers and school counselors, who are familiar with a given youth. The disclosure of confidential information to such a multidisciplinary team for use in prevention and intervention is authorized by the State of California's Welfare and Institutions Codes, sections 827–830.1.

When they receive the student referral report, the members of the Youth and Family Resource Team consider a range of school- and community-based treatment options and make recommendations for treatment. However, treatment recommendations are often enhanced by information that goes beyond the original student referral report. Team members familiar with the youth frequently provide additional information that allows the team to understand the youth's circumstances more fully. This sharing of information leads to better informed treatment recommendations than would be provided by any agency or service provider working alone.

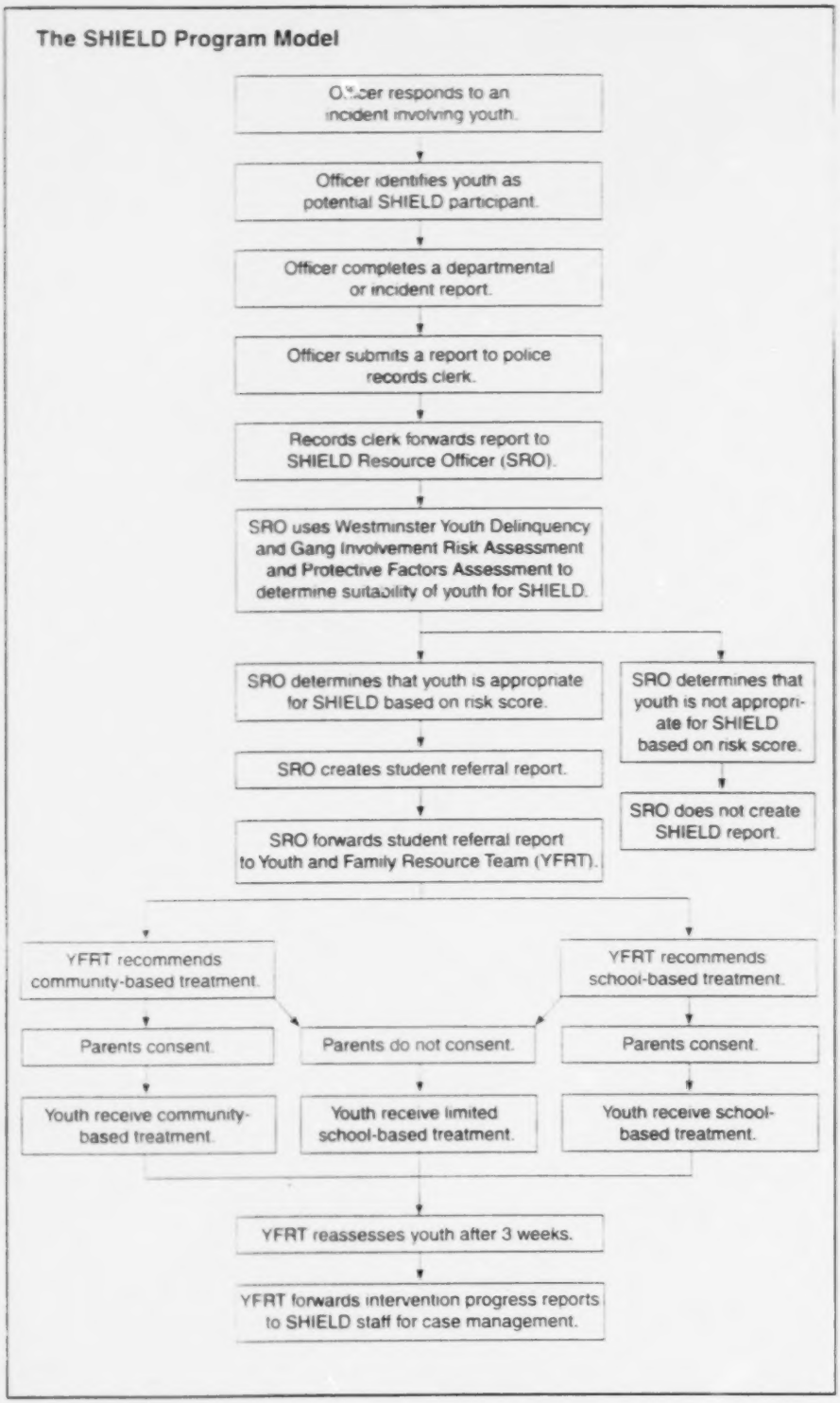
Depending on the recommendation, treatment may or may not require parental consent. For example, if the Youth and Family Resource Team recommends that a youth receive individual counseling from a community treatment provider, parental consent generally is necessary. However, in cases where the team recommends informal school-based monitoring of the youth, no parental consent is required. Treatment providers such as school counselors and community-based service providers are generally responsible for getting parental consent when it is necessary. In the early stages of the program, treatment providers were also responsible for notifying parents of their



[1] The description of the SHIELD referral process presented here draws on information from Kent and Wyrick, 1998.

[2] This position title should not be confused with the same abbreviation commonly used for school resource officers. In the case of Westminster, however, the SHIELD resource officer did formerly serve as a school resource officer.

[3] Researchers have noted the importance of recognizing developmental factors in prevention programming (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1998; Tatem-Kelley et al., 1997).


The SHIELD Program Model
Officer responds to an incident involving youth.
Officer identifies youth as potential SHIELD participant.
Officer completes a departmental or incident report.
Officer submits a report to police records clerk.
Records clerk forwards report to SHIELD Resource Officer (SRO).
SRO uses Westminster Youth Delinquency and Gang Involvement Risk Assessment and Protective Factors Assessment to determine suitability of youth for SHIELD.
SRO determines that youth is appropriate for SHIELD based on risk score.
SRO creates student referral report.
SRO forwards student referral report to Youth and Family Resource Team (YFRT).
SRO determines that youth is not appropriate for SHIELD based on risk score.
SRO does not create SHIELD report.
YFRT recommends community-based treatment.
YFRT recommends school-based treatment.
Parents consent.
Parents do not consent.
Parents consent.
Youth receive community-based treatment.
Youth receive limited school-based treatment.
Youth receive school-based treatment.
YFRT reassesses youth after 3 weeks.
YFRT forwards intervention progress reports to SHIELD staff for case management.

child's referral to the SHIELD program. Some parents were upset when they learned that the police department had referred their child to the program. Because many youth in this program are exposed to domestic violence, the parent who is in the position to provide consent for treatment may also be the one who created the risk factors in the home or allowed them to exist in the first place. Therefore, the process of obtaining parental consent is often delicate. In response to this issue, the SRO now contacts parents directly when their child is referred to the program. During this contact, the SRO describes the program and addresses any questions or concerns that the parents have. The SRO will make two attempts to contact a parent by telephone and will resort to sending a letter only if these two attempts are unsuccessful. In some cases, the SRO makes home visits.

The Youth and Family Resource Team reassesses the treatment recommendations and progress of each youth 3 weeks after the initial recommendation. While a youth is involved in treatment, the service providers send monthly progress reports to the SHIELD staff at the Westminster Police Department. These reports allow for ongoing tracking and reassessment of the services provided to program youth.

Services for At-Risk Youth

SHIELD relies on services that are already in the community. The program works closely with all of the local schools and the local Boys & Girls Club. During the first year of the program, 60 percent of youth who were referred to SHIELD received services in some form (Kent and Wyrick, 1998). Individual and group counseling were commonly used in both school and community settings. Issues covered in counseling varied based on the circumstances of the individual youth, but common themes included anger management, goal setting, pregnancy prevention, conflict resolution, and other coping skills. In some cases, treatment plans for youth were more specialized. For example, one youth who had a history of drug involvement and exposure to family violence served as an assistant instructor for a summer program on drug use prevention and received individual coun-

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seling related to setting and achieving goals.

Informal school-based monitoring is also frequently included in treatment plans. Informal monitoring may be used in conjunction with other treatment or as a stand-alone treatment when the youth show a low level of risk in conjunction with many protective factors or when parental consent for more intensive treatment is not granted. When teachers and administrators are aware of the risk factors that a student faces outside the classroom and they are actively monitoring that student, they are more likely to detect and respond to early signs of problem behavior, abuse, or neglect.

Challenges for Implementation

Relying on alternatives for treatment that already exist in the community poses a challenge for implementation of the SHIELD model. The development of SHIELD exposed gaps in the services available to youth in Westminster. As the program has evolved, members of the multidisciplinary team have tried to fill these gaps to provide a more complete and coordinated system of services. For example, schools serve as a primary resource for the program, but during the summer months, school-based services like counseling and instruction are not available. To address this concern, the Westminster Boys & Girls Club increased services and resources during summer months and prioritized SHIELD youth based on who had the greatest need for continuing services.

Even during the academic year, schools have varying resources for providing services to students. In Westminster, the workload of qualified counselors and school psychologists at the high school level is much heavier than that of their counterparts at the elementary or middle school level. As a result, high school youth were not receiving the same level of focused preventive treatment as younger students. In response, multidisciplinary team members coordinated to arrange for a supervised counseling intern from the Boys & Girls Club to be assigned to the high school. The school provided space for the intern to meet with SHIELD program youth during school hours. This arrangement helped to fill a gap in service availability for high school youth who were recommended for school-based counseling services.

In some cases, meeting needs meant developing entirely new programs. Recognizing the limited resources that were available for leadership development, the Westminster Police Department collaborated with local middle schools to create the Westminster Youth Academy (formerly known as Warner Youth Leadership Academy). This program is a school-based effort to improve academic performance and build leadership and planning skills, thereby enhancing the protective factors in the lives of at-risk youth. An assessment of short-term behavioral and academic outcomes revealed that SHIELD youth who participated in the Academy significantly improved in attendance and grade point average relative both to their own earlier performance and to the performance of a comparison group of non-Academy students (Wyrick and Kent, 1998).

Westminster has not eliminated every deficit in services for at-risk youth. For example, services that target non-English-speaking youth in a culturally appropriate way are still needed, and treatment options for children under age 5 remain limited. Nevertheless, by even identifying needs that it cannot immediately fulfill, SHIELD has allowed Westminster to begin working on solutions for affected youth.

Supporting Factors

The development of the SHIELD program in Westminster benefited greatly from four supporting factors. First and foremost, the program received visionary leadership and support from the administration of the Westminster Police Department, which—by recognizing the importance of targeted prevention and the role of law enforcement support for community collaboration in delinquency prevention—made the SHIELD program possible. Second, Westminster secured Federal block grant funding to initiate the program and support it through its early development. However, external funding has not been required for continued program operation beyond the period of the initial grant. Third, the development of the Youth and Family Resource Team and the provision of services to youth benefited from the strong community ties and collaboration that the police department had already established. Fourth, the presence within the Westminster Police Department of a Research and Planning Office with a full-time social psychologist and several research associates allowed for an internal formative evaluation during the first year of SHIELD program operation and a 1-year followup. The evaluation facilitated the development of SHIELD by identifying unanticipated obstacles to full implementation and providing timely feedback to program administrators from a trusted source.

Measuring Program Success

Any evaluation of program effectiveness depends on the criteria that are chosen to determine success. If connecting youth to community resources and services is the criterion for success of the SHIELD program, then it is clearly a success. Of the 43 randomly selected youth who were tracked during the first year of operation, 60 percent received services of some kind, 26 percent could not be contacted because they were no longer in the community (e.g., the family had relocated, or the youth had run away), and 14 percent were still in the community but did not receive services because of parental refusal (Kent and Wyrick, 1998).

If delinquency prevention among targeted youth is the criterion for success, then judgments are more difficult to make. The use of multiple treatment modalities and providers across the community makes an impact evaluation of the SHIELD program challenging. Outcomes are largely dependent on the quality of the services and programs to which youth are referred. The formative evaluation included a qualitative assessment of participant satisfaction with the counseling provided through SHIELD, and the results were promising. The findings from the evaluation of the Westminster Youth Academy also reflect positively on the SHIELD program (Wyrick and Kent, 1998). However, results of these evaluations are short term and are limited to a portion of the youth who are engaged in the program. In the absence of impact evaluation data for each treatment modality in the community, assessment of the overall level of delinquency prevention that SHIELD has brought to Westminster is impossible. Even if such an evaluation were conducted, the potential for generalizing from the

findings would be limited because of the unique combination of services available in the community. Nevertheless, the identification and referral activities stand as the central program elements of SHIELD, and these show great promise as a model for the mobilization of community resources to prevent delinquency.

Replication of SHIELD

The administration of the Westminster Police Department believes that focused delinquency prevention is an important component of its law enforcement and community protection responsibilities. The SHIELD program was designed to allow the police department to contribute most effectively to community-based delinquency prevention efforts. By drawing on the experiences in Westminster, law enforcement agencies in other communities may replicate the SHIELD program and modify it to suit their local needs.

Of the supporting factors noted above, the only one that must exist prior to replication is strong administrative support within the law enforcement agency. A history of community collaboration and strong ties to service providers and schools is important and will help any program, but these are not critical preexisting conditions. When a law enforcement agency decides to replicate SHIELD, the first step is to assemble the Youth and Family Resource Team. Agencies represented on this team should assist in considering modifications to the referral process and assessing the availability of local services. Although a systematic assessment of services available in the community was not done in Westminster prior to program implementation, such an assessment would benefit any replication effort. This assessment, also known as a resource inventory, should examine a variety of factors (for example, the types of services available and their service capacity, the length of waiting lists, the extent and quality of recordkeeping, and the number and condition of facilities) to identify service providers, highlight untapped resources, and uncover gaps in services available to youth. A local college or university research partner may be available to assist with this effort at low cost. Additional information on conducting needs assessments and resource inventories can be found in Witkin and Altschuld (1995) and Kettner, Moroney, and Martin (1999).

The SHIELD program is not expensive; staff time is the primary expense for law enforcement. In Westminster, the SHIELD program is staffed by one full-time officer and two half-time police interns. The interns are responsible primarily for assisting with the development of student referral reports for the Youth and Family Resource Team and maintaining a computerized case management system. The officer carries out administrative functions of the program, participates in Youth and Family Resource Team meetings, and completes risk assessment instruments for youth.

Conclusion

The unique position of local law enforcement agencies in communities allows them to play important roles in the early identification of at-risk youth. Programs and approaches that take advantage of this position and provide a clear mechanism for linking at-risk youth to services in the community show great promise for preventing delinquency. The SHIELD program is continuing to evolve in its effort to better meet the needs of youth in the community and better mobilize resources to support this effort. The critical supporting factor for the SHIELD program is not funding—it is the commitment and support of law enforcement administrators and personnel who are dedicated to preventing delinquency. Local law enforcement agencies are encouraged to consider replication and adaptation of SHIELD in their jurisdictions.

For Further Information

For more information about the SHIELD program, contact:

Captain Andrew Hall
City of Westminster Police Department
8200 Westminster Boulevard
Westminster, CA 92683
714–898–3315, ext. 302

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Phelan A. Wyrick is a program manager in the Research and Program Development Division of OJJDP. He formerly served as a research associate in the Research and Planning Office in the Westminster, CA, Police Department.

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